

A DARK & DEMENTED ANTHOLOGY: HORROR BLINKS (VOL. 1)

Nina Hobson

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PRONOUN

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A DARK & DEMENTED ANTHOLOGY

HORROR BLINKS (VOL. 1)

WRITTEN BY NINA HOBSON

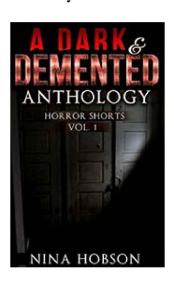
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FAMILY

IT WAS GOOD THE REAL estate agent wasn't as ethical as he should have been. Full disclosure their asses.

The unkempt Victoria had sat on the market for over a year. Weather-worn and unloved but sturdy and regal, they knew it was for them. It would be a good place for them to recuperate after their last miscarriage, a beautiful place to start their family. They were still young and had lots of love to give. Somewhere out there a child needed them. They wanted a child. They would do anything to have a family.

Thank God for adoption.

"Good news, she may be here to stay next week," his wife squealed in joy.

The attic still held a twin-sized bed plus pink furniture and drapes, everything their daughter would want. All it needed was a bit of cleaning.

She would be happy here with them. They would be a family.

"Look what I found at the store. A pink table lamp with a built-in clock. It matches, don't you think? The woman caught her husband's excitement, rode its waves right along with him.

"She'll love it!

He strutted into the room, grinning, a can of Pearl White paint held high in each hand.

"For our little princess."

She laughed, nodded in happiness.

They spent the rest of the day painting the room and the remainder of the week lugging the furniture and other things from the attic, cleaning and arranging it all in the small bedroom.

On the last day, they called it quits. The phone rang and they both raced to answer. Giggling, she beat him to it.

"Hello?"

"Yes, we did it. It's quite lovely, in fact."

We did the best we could.

"You can come anytime tomorrow to check it if you'd like. I'm sure it'll be good enough."

Please let us be good enough.

"You'll think about it?"

Please let her be ours.

"Okay, then. Goodnight."

Sitting in their homey, yellow and white kitchen, at their table set for three, picking at a dinner of soup and sandwiches, he allowed the doubts to resurface.

"What if it's not enough?" He stared at his wife, stricken. "What if we aren't enough?"

His wife, bless her soul, just shook her head.

"Any child would be happy to have us as their parents. Besides, we'll know either way tomorrow. Until then, we keep the faith."

The verdict came a few days later.

It was not what she wanted.

The books from the library gave them all they needed. Soon, the room was complete.

She came by again two weeks later, her shoes soundless on the hardwood floor.

"Please, just look around, it'll be good enough this time," he begged.

She frowned but did as she was asked.

Unmoved, she shook her head, her voice hollow. "No. I don't want this."

At the door, her body slammed into something hard. Invisible.

She tried to disappear but merely flickered.

"We are a family now."

The little girl wailed her grief.

IT SHALL BE DONE

THE BELL CHIMES. HAROLD LOOKS at the grandfather clock: 2pm. He risks a glance at the man sitting in his torn, overstuffed chair and the handsome guard handcuffed to a stainless steel briefcase flanking him. He had fifteen minutes to go.

He can do this.

Harold wipes the sweat from the back of his neck, swipes his hands along his pants. He sits on his trembling hands when he can't stop their shaking.

He can do this.

To his right in the cramped room, his computer is open to the page on Italian Villas for sale. He had found a real nice one near Lucca with a view of the mountains.

His lips curl at the corner just so.

He can do this.

His bags are packed, all he needs to do is load them into his old, rundown Pinto. All he has to do is make it through these last few minutes. Pretend he was something else for just a little bit longer.

He smiles lightly.

He can do this.

"So..."

Harold nearly jumps out of his skin. He had zoned out just that fast. His mind on the helicopter rides they have planned, visiting the multiple small islands in the Bahamas. Maybe he'll even propose.

He offers the man a full blown smile, tilts his head to glean a covert reading of the time. Ten minutes to go. His leg bounces, giddily.

His heart beats frantically in anticipation of the fulfillment of a lifetime dream.

He can do this.

"Yes? I'm sorry, Mr....?"

"Dr. Berkley."

"Yes, Dr. Berkley?"

The man leans over in the chair, a tuff of dingy cotton pokes out just a bit further. Harold can smell the pompousness seeping from his pores, see his reflection in his spectacles. The guard smirks at him. "All this money you're about to come in to, do you think it'll make you different?"

Harold startles, taken unawares by the question. His smile fades. His heartbeat slows. His leg stills.

"What?"

"The money...do you think it'll make you a better person?"

The man struggles to get out of the chair, finally finds his feet and braces himself against the chair arms to push up and out, nearly landing in Harold's lap. He ambles to the back of Harold's seat, pats his shoulder. Harold glances at the guard watching them, stupefied. The guard frowns.

Dr. Berkley crouches down to eye level.

"You have one minute. Choose the straight and narrow, Harold." The man waves over the guard, passes Harold a pen.

Harold trades a stare with the doctor, understanding floods his eyes.

Yes, he can do this.

Harold hears the chiming of the clock...time's up.

"It's okay, Harold. We're gonna be so happy together," the guard says as he kisses Harold's neck on the way out the door.

The doctor's body lies bloody, slumped in the armchair, pen sticking out of his eye. A form pokes from his pocket.

Harold smiles, money in hand, lost in unrestricted love.

He did it.

SEEING RED

THE POLICE WERE HERE ONCE again - another murder. He dipped under the yellow caution tape before the cops could see him. The naked, dead body with the note nailed into the back of its head, lying on the sidewalk outside the doors helped a lot with that. The third one this month here.

The homeless man snuck around the corner to the dumpsters. The chic High Rise on Orchard Street has the best trash.

The man made sure he got there bright and early before the collectors and his street competition beat him to it. Guess he wouldn't have to worry about that today. He shook his head in sympathy.

That poor bastard.

Rummaging through the big container, he came upon all manner of the building occupants' wasteful lives: half-eaten expensive food, barely worn high-end shoes, a piece of valuable-looking jewelry (which he promptly slide into the pocket without the hole in it), and a leather wallet containing \$20.

Today was a good day.

He scavenged all he could comfortably carry, was about to head back to his spot by the railroad tracks when a flash of color caught his eye.

He carefully stashed his take deeper into the alley, hidden from view.

Returning to the dumpster, he jumped back up and in, ducking when a cop walked by the alley entrance. Coast clear, he sorted through the trash and found what had captured his attention – a red tie.

Wiping the excess grime from it with a dirty hand, he held it up to his chest and looked down.

"Jackpot."

Stuffing it in his pants pocket, he climbed back out, picked up his things and headed home.

That evening in his makeshift tent surrounded by other unfortunates like himself, he tried on his find...admired himself in his broken hand mirror.

He felt authoritative in his new tie. Grand. Majestic, even. Red means power.

He smoothed his hand down the silky piece of fabric, wet his thumb in his mouth and used it to scrub out an outstanding stain.

Stepping out of his humble abode, he strolled around the camp, head held high as he verbally greeted all he met. And they all ogled him with their mouths' agape.

They followed behind him, dogged his every step, stared at him in awe, whispered excitedly amongst themselves about him, and gestured toward him. He was somebody in his new tie. Somebody important.

Tittering louder, the people approached him, circled him. A woman in tattered old clothes yelled angrily, "Another one! Just who the hell do you think you are? Give us peace! What, don't your kind ever get enough of slumming?"

Afraid and confused, he stumbled away.

The crowd gives chase. They push at him. He falls. They swarm.

Outside the swanky high rise, the naked body grows cold and stiff. The note attached reads: 'Stay With Your Own Kind!'

Further down the street, a life-weary man roots hopefully through a nearempty garbage can.

Inside the dumpster, the tie awaits.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

BASIL QUARTERMAINE TOSSES THE NOTE to the floor, puffing along on the expensive exercise bike. "Hobbs!"

His manservant appears by his side. "Sir?"

"Is everything set?

"All is ready, sir. Randolph is on his way with your guest right now."

The actor jumps from the bike, tosses his wet, expensive Egyptian cotton towel toward his help, smacking him square in the face. Hobbs sighs, removes it disgustedly between two pinched fingers. His employer sprints for his ensuite, luxury bathroom.

"Is my-"

"I've just hung your attire on the rack by your bed, sir."

"Yes, I have to impress."

"Will there be anything else, sir?"

The actor yells from in the shower, agitated, "No. Now for heavens' sake, Hobbs, let me get ready."

The butler shakes his head wearily in acceptance.

Fifteen minutes later Basil impatiently watches out the window as his personal car pulls up in his long driveway. An unassuming man gets out. He looks around, awed by the expansive, beautifully landscaped lawn.

"Bring him in, Hobbs. Quickly before one of the neighbors see."

"Yes, sir." He hurries out, ushers in the smiling, excited man. Hobbs escorts him directly to his employer's office.

"Mr. Basil Quartermaine?

The actor, sitting in the soft leather chair, turns from behind his massive oak desk. Basil stands, goes to greet the man - he extends his hand, smiling hugely.

"Guilty as charged. And you are, let me see..." He takes the letter from the pocket of his custom-made suit, "ah yes, Mr. Cortland Peregrine-Spaulding, I presume."

"Why, yes I am." He blushes. "Thank you so much for having me here. But I have to ask and please don't take offence, sir."

"Basil."

"Basil. I'm sure you get thousands of letters every week. You're a legend. With all due respect, why did you invite *me* here?"

Basil goes behind his desk, hefts up a giant postal bag full of mail, and dumps it all on his desk. Some spills over onto the floor.

"You see these? Believe it or not, I read each and every piece. People love Basil Quartermaine, have for years. But the thing is, I'm not a very good actor. Do you know how I got discovered?"

Cortland shakes his head.

"I used to muck out horse stalls for the rich at the very country club of which I am now a member. A producer saw my name on the job board and took a shine to it because it sounded *pretentious*."

He saunters back in front of his desk, pulls out a small revolver out of his pocket.

"Your name sticks out like a sore thumb. Do you know what would happen to my career if tale of your snooty name ever hit the circuit? I'd lose my livelihood by the end of that day. I'm sorry my dear boy but you simply have to go."

Basil shoots Cortland, then sighs.

"Hobbs."

Hobbs enters, horrified. "My God, sir. This one got blood on your best suit." Grateful, Basil preens.

SOCKKA TO HIM

SOCKKA FOUND HIM ON THE sixth day, 24 hours before laundry time. He was wrapped around a silk dress sock. More than a textural step up from the gym sock which she was.

She stares, heartbroken. "So, this is where you've been all this time? We get separated and you don't even try to make your way a few square inches back to me? Look at me, I think I've begun to go gray worrying about you!"

A drawer jerking open below theirs causes him to move closer to the thinner piece of shiny fiber.

"Don't act surprised, I didn't ask to be with you. We were thrown together because both of us had lost our original mates. Just look at yourself! You let your elastic go! You slouch all the time! And you're chock full of lint on the inside. Even Owner knows we don't belong together anymore, that's why he decided *not* to roll us together."

He stretches out, lazily.

"He brought a new pack, did you know? He's gonna pair me with one of the younger ones after a while...and. I. can't. wait! He'll probably use you for cleaning."

Sockka pills that night, more than when she lost her original mate to the black hole of the laundry's wonky washing machine. She pills until she looks fluffy but she also makes a clear decision. She spends the night rubbing up against any fabrics that come her way when Owner yanks open any drawer of the dresser.

Later the next evening when Owner reaches in her drawer, Sockka makes her move. Static cling build-up allows her to attach herself to the underside of his sweater. She drops to his pants leg, holds on for dear life throughout the elevator ride down to the laundry room.

Once inside, she falls off, lands by the foot of a woman as she accidently drops an armful of clothes to the floor removing them from the dryer.

Mingling with the other clean clothes, she's scooped up and dumped haphazardly into a basket without being sorted, on her way to her new life.

A MONTH LATER

Sockka grins at her mate, happy in a committed, mix-matched relationship with a woolly new mate, beloved pair of comfort socks to one that spoils them obsessively.

New Owner stands with her feet together, feeding coins into her machine, it's there that she spots him under a washing machine. Dirty, holey, frayed, lying wasted in a puddle of bleach. He was soaking it - a slave shackled to his constraining addiction.

He sees her, croaks out hoarsely, "Sockka..."

Owner turns away, heads for the elevator.

The next morning, Sockka hears, while relaxing on the puffy ottoman in front of the television, her Owner speak over the phone that due to complaints, a cleaning crew had went through the laundry room thoroughly last night after she'd started her wash.

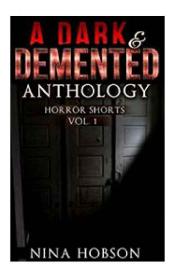
All unclaimed clothes had been put into a commercial plastic bag and thrown into the building's garbage incinerator.

END

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1. AND PLEASE...

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